

HOW TO GET A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

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Rev. Lori Fleming

MEDITATION

I invite you to closer your outer eyes, to make yourself comfortable in your chair. Take in a deep, cleansing breath; release it slowly. Take in another mindful breath, letting go of any busy-ness you've had so far today. Just gently release; let everything go as you relax your body and calm your mind. Begin to move your awareness within: to that quiet, still place. That place of peace that passes understanding. That place where we are one with Spirit, and that recognize the oneness with all of humanity. With every living being across the planet. Truly, we are all one!

In this sacred sanctuary of our hearts, we feel God's unconditional love well up in us. A warmth that warms our souls and allows us to see each other with loving eyes. With kindness. With compassion. That each and every one of us is an unrepeatable expression of the Living God. An important part of the great whole that we call humanity: every color and every size and every shape that comes together in the great tapestry of life. And each and every one is important. And, without one, the whole would be diminished.

Sweet Spirit, in this sacred moment, we recognize the gratitude for everything that we have. For friends and family. For all of the good that is coming our way now and in the future. We say "Yes!" to receiving it from your great bounty, O, God.

And so we take just a few moments as we move more deeply into the silence, as we feel God's love all around us.

SILENCE

Sweet Spirit, we come in gratitude for this time of prayer and meditation that lifts us out of the old ordinary into a brand new way of thinking and doing. We say thank you for all our blessings; we have too many to count. We thank you for these amazing lives that we get to live; we're so grateful that you created us, O, God. And so we say thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And it is so. Amen.

MESSAGE

Rev. Lori Fleming: So the title of my talk tonight is "How to Get a Second Chance at Life." Anybody want a second chance? Third chance? Fourth chance? Yeah! We don't live in a perfect world. Well, some people say it is, but not all the time, right? We may even be on our one-thousandths chance right now! And I'm not ashamed to admit it. Because I've failed a lot, that means I've tried a lot. And I suspect that that might be the same for some of you.

It's been said that the only difference between an obstacle and an opportunity is attitude. The only difference and an opportunity is attitude! And we get to choose if what we see in front of us is an obstacle, or if we turn it into an opportunity. For example, I live in Cave Creek. I come to church by driving down Cave Creek Road. Now, the last couple of years, they've been expanding all the bridges on the 101. Right? So it's always an adventure when I come to work, because I don't know which lane's going to be closed, which one's going to get paved, which ones has those orange cone things, you know? If you'd all stop and pick one or two of them up on the way and put them in your garage, we wouldn't have to worry about 'em any more! They wouldn't be there!

Sometimes they're tearing up the road, putting in sewers and water. Sometimes they're paving the road. But this morning, I drive down. I made almost all the lights. I get to the bridge; the bridge is open. I'm like, "Thank you, God! That was really great! That was really unusual! Thank you! Oh, yeah, I need to

get some gas. I better turn into Costco.” So I turned into Costco, and as I turned the corner ... you didn’t pick enough orange barrels, because there they were! And they were paving every single lane of the road, and I couldn’t get into the gas station at Costco. So I started to get a little upset, seeing there was an obstacle in my way. And I started to realize I wasn’t even going to be able to turn into Costco; I was going to have to drive

I thought, *“Okay; great! I’m going to turn this obstacle into an opportunity, because that’s what I’m talking about tonight. So I’d better practice before I get there.”* So I turn the radio up, and I start singing with the song. And I’m driving along, and suddenly I get to a place where I can do a legal U-turn, and I turn around. And when I get to Costco, there’s nobody there, because nobody can get in! So I was the first person in line. You know how long you have to wait at Costco!

So getting a second chance at life is about giving ourselves the opportunity to grow – beyond our past failures, beyond our past mistakes, beyond the things that just plain old didn’t work out – to see things differently. Getting a second chance is about allowing ourselves the luxury of making those mistakes. We’ve all made them! Learning from them and doing better next time.

Let’s look at some ways to get a second chance at life.

No matter what happened to us in the past, you are not your past. I don’t care what you’ve done. I don’t care where you’ve been. I don’t care how bad you think you’ve been. The past no longer matters. No matter where you’ve been – no matter how chaotic it’s been – today is the beginning of the future. And you have a clean slate to create your life any way you want. We are not our past habits. We are not our past failures ...unless, of course, we keep doing them, and then you’re going to recreate them! We all know that insanity is doing the same thing over and over and over again and expecting different results. Right? Don’t do that. *[Congregation laughs] I’m done! [Rev. Fleming laughs]*

We aren’t how people have treated us in our past. We are only what we think right now: in this now moment. We are only what we do right now: in this now moment. Because that’s how we’ve created our lives. The good news is that, if you want a second chance at life, you’re not trapped in past circumstances. Hello! You may just need to re-learn something. Or you may need to un-learn something! Yeah. That’s the mirror I’m looking at right now.

Everything in life is multi-sided; we live in this dimensional universe. It’s up and down, and in and out, and right and left, and east and north and south. And we get to choose! We aren’t stuck with all of them at the same time! We get to choose which side we want to focus on.

Because if you really want a second chance in life: here’s the big one. You have to accept responsibility for our current situation. Yeah: “the R word.” We’re the only one who has direct control of the outcomes in our lives. Now, I know that we live with other people, and they have their own problems. And we do have to live with those problems. But you are responsible for your own life.

But that’s the good news! Now, I never said life was easy or fair. When I was a little girl, and my brothers or sister or friend would get something that I wanted and I didn’t get it, I’d go crying to my dad. And I’d say, *“Daddy, life’s not fair.”* And he’d go, *“Yeah, I know, Lori; life’s not fair! Get over it!”* *[Congregation laughs]* Okay. Tough love! But it was a good lesson, right?

We face a maze of obstacles in our lives. And what did I tell you to do with obstacles? Change your attitude and turn them into opportunities. Right? Opportunities are the second chance in life. Choosing not to take responsibility is giving up your power! Don’t do it! Every difficult situation is accompanied by an opportunity for personal growth and creativity at the very depths of our souls. That’s why we’re here: to grow and learn and create.

And, after we realize that we’re not our past, and after we’ve taken responsibility for it, then we have to let go of the past. If we hold on to our past mistakes, it’s like drinking poison and expecting someone

else to die. Letting go of the past means forgiving ourselves and forgiving each other for those silly, unconscious things we may have said and done. Those unkind words or those thoughtless gestures. Let them go! They're part of the past! They have no power over us today unless you give them power.

Difficulties are like everything else in life: pretty soon, they change. They pass away. And when they pass, we're left with those unique experiences and lessons for us to learn so that we can change our lives and live in a more conscious way.

If you really want a second chance in life, identify the lesson. Everything in life brings the opportunity for a lesson. Sometimes we have to learn that lesson more than once. Sometimes we don't recognize it the first time it comes around. I promise: if you're supposed to learn, it'll come around again! I know this for a fact! It's happened to me!

Everyone we meet or encounter has something to teach us. Wouldn't it be great if we learned that the first time? The first time we meet someone? If we don't get that job that we want ... I promise you! Something better's coming along. That's the way Spirit works! You may fill out an application; you may get an interview. You may not get the job. You may say, *"Well, I did my best; that's all I'm going to do."* You may have to fill out 100 applications to get your perfect job! But when you get it, you'll look back and you'll say, *"Yup! It took 99 applications to find the job that didn't work, and now I have the one that does."* Because sometimes things take time. Sooner or later, that perfect job will come along.

And each lesson that we learn is a step towards our greater good and the life we want to live. Now, what about those times we don't get what we want? Like that job? Not getting what you want can be a blessing. Sometimes it's a wonderful stroke of good luck that we don't get what we want. Why? Because it forces us to re-evaluate things. Not getting what we want can help us to recognize new open doors of opportunities and information we may have overlooked.

One of my favorite quotations of Jesus is, *"Turn the other cheek."* Why? Because when you turn the other cheek, you look in a new direction. That door's closed; but that one might be open. And that one might be open. Wow! There's a great one back there! Look for new opportunities! Turn the other cheek and look in a new direction!

Now, I know that none of us has ever done this before, but if you really want a second chance at life, don't make the problem bigger than it is. [Congregation laughs] Some of us are really good at that. I've done it a few times myself, I have to admit. We all know those drama queens and kings who, when they get a problem, they just blow it up. And it's gigantic, and it's all they talk about for days! And pretty soon it just takes over their lives. And, stop! I've had enough! No! [Congregation laughs]

No! Don't blow it out of proportion! If you have a problem, look at it realistically. Make a list; evaluate it. *"Okay; here's what I don't like. Here's what I do like."* You'll figure it out! You don't get bonus points for making a mountain out of a molehill. No, you don't get bonus points for making a mountain out of a molehill. And complaining is a waste of valuable energy; we know this! And you don't get bonus points for complaining, either! So there! [Congregation laughs]

Eliminate everything that's not essential to getting what you want. All that fluffy stuff – all those little side things that you think, *"Well, maybe this would be good! I could add that!"* Or, *"Yeah, oh; that's good! I like that!"* No! It just clutters everything up! Getting rid of everything but the essentials simplifies things, and it leaves us with the ability to write on that clean slate exactly what we want. It builds a fresh, solid foundation to build on without any interference from things that have no business being there to begin with.

I remember when my grandson was in second grade, and they were teaching how to do story problems. I don't know about you, but story problems always were hard for me. And he got this story problem – I don't remember it exactly – but it was a second-grade story problem. It was like, *"Johnny has a car. It*

has a steering wheel, and it has four tires, and it has a windshield, and it has blah, blah, blah. How many tires does he need to drive the car?" And Joel goes, *"Well, that's easy, Ga."* He calls me Ga. He goes, *"We know we don't need a windshield to drive the car; we know we don't need a steering wheel. We need the four tires! That's the answer!"* You just eliminate everything you don't need. The kid's a genius!
[Congregants laugh]

So we cannot accomplish anything if we're trying to accomplish everything. Once again, I'm looking in the mirror. We can't accomplish anything if we're trying to accomplish everything. Eliminate what you don't need; concentrate on the essentials, and get rid of the rest.

If you really want a second chance at life, focus on the things you can change. I bet you can think of two or three things right now you could change this night – before you go to bed – to make your day better tomorrow. Now, I know that some things are out of our control. I know that! But if you can't change something, maybe there's a way to learn to deal with it in a more graceful way. Find a way to turn it into a positive. Do the best we can with the resources we have at hand. Because when you're trying to look for a better ways, other better ways are going to attract themselves to you. That's the Law of Attraction! And they'll come together and you'll go, *"That's a really good one! Yeah; let's do that!"* Find a way to make it positive, and invest your energy in only the things you can change. Don't worry about the rest of it; it will all work out on its own.

If you really want a second chance at life, focus on what you have, not what you don't have. Because what you think about all day long is what you bring into your life. And if you're thinking about what you don't have, you're going to get more of what you don't have ... and that's not what you want! Focus on what you have, not what you don't have ...

Because holding one positive thought will inspire us to move forward. And you have one positive thought inspires you to another positive thought ... and, pretty soon, all you're doing is having positive thoughts! That's awesome!

Remember: this is a Unity principle; you've heard it before. **Thoughts held in mind reproduce after their own kind.** Or another way to say that is: Whatever you can conceive and believe, you can achieve. Thoughts held in mind reproduce after their own kind. And whatever you can conceive and believe, you can achieve. You can do this stuff, my friend! It's not rocket science! And I don't think there's any rocket scientists in this room ... I know I'm not, but maybe there are! I don't know.

If you really, really, really want a second chance at life, lose the negative attitude. Negative thinking creates negative results. Positive thinking creates positive results. We get to choose! Which is it? Positive thinking is at the heart of every great success story I have ever heard in my life. You hear a great success story – you know, rags-to-riches kind of story – every adversity: *"I can get over this; that's no problem. I can do this!"* Every single successful story in life had a positive experience going on to make it the success story.

And I've always said we don't have the luxury of negative thinking. I don't want that in my life. Because if you ask negative questions, you're going to get negative answers. There's no positive response to, *"Why meee-eeee-eee? Boo hoo hooo hooo."* *[Congregation laughs]* Playing the victim gets you nowhere. People don't even want to give you sympathy any more, I'm telling you. They don't care! Turn the question into a positive direction.

Well, maybe somebody ... somebody does care, but ... Please don't send me emails about that!
[Congregation laughs] Don't play the victim!

So, instead of saying, *"Why me?"* could we say, *"What have I learned from this experience?"* And then use that to catapult you into your next greater life. Or, *"What can I do right now to move forward?"* One

little thought to move yourself forward will take you out of that hole you've been in so fast, you won't even believe you got out of it.

If you really want to get a second change at life, we have to be willing to give life our all: our heart, our soul, our muscle, our mind, our willingness to show up and say, "Yes!" when we don't want to get out of bed in the morning. When we've been in this pandemic so long that we sleep late because we don't have anything better to do ... You have to be willing to say, "Yes!" to life! You have to strengthen your self-control to let go of that negative thinking to do the things that you want to do.

Start with just one activity: one simple activity. And then plan ahead for all of the trouble spots that you know are going to come along ... because they will! So you'll know what to do when that problem arises. For example, say you'd like to lose about 20 pounds. Create a list of healthy snacks. Buy the snacks; put them in your pantry, put them in your desk, put them in your refrigerator. Every place you are: your purse, your car. So when you start thinking about that chocolate donut [*congregation laughs*] that's calling you, you can run and get one of the healthy snacks. And you start a habit that will overcome your old habit. And pretty soon, you'll be dropping the weight like crazy. It might be hard at the beginning, but I promise it'll get easier. And that's the whole point! When we get stronger, then we can take on even bigger challenges easily, gracefully.

If you really want a second chance at life, remember: our future is unwritten. It's a blank slate! This is really good news! If our future is unwritten, we get to write it exactly how we want it to be, moment by moment. The past is just that: it's the past. The future's waiting for us to create it! When you get up in the morning, don't start the day with those ideas of how you failed in the past. Please don't do that! Every day is a new beginning! Let those ideas go and, instead, bring forth some amazing ideas on how you want to be a benefit to the world today. How you want people to say, "*Hey, Lori; you look great! You're just who I wanted to talk to!*" You see people everywhere smiling.

I have a friend; his name is Harvey. And when you say, "*Hey, Harvey; how are you doing?*" He goes, "*Greatest day of my life!*" Sometimes I just want to call him up and say, "*Harvey, how you doing?*" so he'll say, "*Greatest day of my life!*" Right? You can adopt that if you want! He said anybody who wants to can use that. "*Greatest day of my life!*" I like that!

In order to overcome and move past the mistakes, our job is to concentrate all our attention and effort on doing something that our future selves will thank us for. Right now, concentrate on doing things that your future self will thank you for. Think about that for a moment! Because our future is unwritten, we need to figure out: what do we really, really, really, really, really, really want? If you don't know what you really want, you're like that hamster that my grandson, Joel, brought home in the ... He was in junior high, I think. And he brought it home on the weekends. Did you know hamsters are nocturnal? They run on their wheel all night long ... squeak, squeak, squeak! [*Congregation laughs*] They lived in this s-m-a-l-l house, and my daughter's like, "*You've got to take that hamster back, Joel!*"

Is that the kind of life you want? Like a hamster running on a wheel? No! We're born with innate talents for music and art and poetry and writing. And being loving friends. And healthcare professionals that heal us. We're here to do good in the world. We don't quit because we don't get it right the first time. No! We keep trying!

Please don't waste our life fulfilling someone else's dream for you. Find your own dream. Follow your own intuition. I promise God will always guide you to the next right and perfect step if you do that. Because that still, small voice within always guides us perfectly if we'll just listen and follow that advice. Never ever give up on who you're capable of being.

Richard Bach, a Unity minister and writer, writes, "*To bring anything into your life, imagine that it's already there.*" To bring anything into your life, imagine that it's already there. See it. Taste it. Touch it.

Smell it. Feel it. Believe that it's yours. Because our imagination is our creative power to vision our life into greatness.

If you really want a second chance at life, be specific. When you set goals, be as specific as possible. *"I want to lose weight"* isn't specific. But if you say, *"I want to lose 20 pounds,"* now, that's specific! And then you have to be specific about what actions you're going to take to lose those 20 pounds. Like healthy snacks, like I said before. Or walking your dog every morning for 30 minutes and every afternoon for 30 minutes. This creates a routine, and it's measurable! Creating a daily routine is a simple thing, but the routine can change everything in our lives, because it helps us to focus on the important stuff instead of the distractions. It helps us to make steady progress. And that's what second chances are all about!

If you really, really, really want a second chance at life, concentrate on doing, instead of not doing. Now, if I asked you not to think about that chocolate donut, you'd immediately get a picture in your mind's eye of a chocolate donut. Right? And then you'd probably start salivating and that person back there in the back's got their phone on; they're googling Dunkin' Donuts right now to see if there's one nearby they can stop by on the way home.

Instead of concentrating on eliminating bad habits, concentrate on creating good habits to replace the old habits. When you think of that chocolate donut, remind yourself that – when you get home – you've got that beautiful, fresh salad waiting for you to eat when you get home tonight. Pretty soon, you'll start doing the right thing without even thinking about it. It'll be a habit.

And if you really want a second chance at life – this one's fun! – forget about impressing people. People buy things they don't need with money they don't have to impress people they don't know ... or, worse, to impress people they don't like. *[Rev. Lori and congregation laugh]* Don't be one of those people! Just keep doing what we know is right to do. When we don't reach our goal, adjust our approach and try again. Didn't your mom tell you? *"Try, try, try again!"*

Remember the Little Engine Who Could? That was one of my favorite books! I remember running around the house going, *"I think I can! I think I can! I think I can!"* *[Congregation laughs]* Yeah! If you can't reach your goal, just keep trying. You'll get there some day!

If you really, really, really want a second chance at life, remember we always have a choice. There's always at least two options. If we can't physically change something, we can change the way we think about it. We can begin to view a crisis as an invitation to learn something new. We can view that shake-up in the outer world – like we've experienced for these last almost two years – as an opportunity to wake up our inner world: to get closer to God. To pray and meditate, because that's what brings us closer to God. We already have all the wisdom within us that we need to do anything we want to do. And prayer and meditation changes our world. It doesn't change God; it changes us at depth. We always have a choice of what we can control right now. And even not making a choice is a choice.

So, finally, if you want a second chance at life, we can remind ourselves that – at the end – there's always a new beginning. When something terrible has happened, we can be assured it won't last forever. Because after every ending is a new beginning. A new, great beginning always occurs at the point that we thought would be the end of everything. And after the ending, we can be thankful for the past: for all the valuable lessons that we learned. All the amazing people that we met who helped us along the way. We can recognize that each and every day is a new day that we get to create exactly as we want to create it. We can tell the future, *"I'm ready now! Bring on that second chance!"*

Thank you!

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